

DATE: February 8, 2024

TO: Mayor Wheeler  
Commissioner Gonzalez  
Commissioner Mapps  
Commissioner Rubio  
Commissioner Ryan

CC: Director Tim Grewe, City Budget Office  
Deputy Director Ruth Levine, City Budget Office  
Chief Administrative Officer Michael Jordan

FROM: Government Transition Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Council budget allocation is insufficient to staff an effective legislative body

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### **Our Charge**

The Government Transition Advisory Committee (GTAC) is a group of Portlanders appointed by the mayor and city council in March 2023. GTAC acts as the primary citizen engagement and advisory body for Portland's government transition.

In an 8/23/23 memo, the 2023 council defined GTAC's scope of work to include:

*“Advise on the role of future Council districts and offices, inclusive of exploring expectations around district/office outreach to the community and constituent relations work.”*

The GTAC finds proposed staffing levels inadequate to support the transition and new city administration. This letter recommends staffing of councilors and council operations for effective legislative development and community engagement.

### **Our Research**

Our recommendations are based on research of councils in 15 peer cities, as well our collective personal and professional expertise. These recommendations also incorporate the expertise of city staff. As explained in this letter, we hope council shares our belief in the importance of equipping future leadership for success.

**Key points:**

- The staffing levels set by the Current Appropriation Levels (CAL) Ordinance 191526 do not adequately support future council in their legislative duties and role in community engagement.
- Research in peer cities has shown that -- under the CAL Ordinance -- Portland would have the lowest per-councilor staffing among them, at one FTE each.
- Research shows that – under the CAL Ordinance – Portland's total combined staffing for a presiding officer, shared legislative staff and operations staff would likewise be among the lowest of peer cities.
- Sufficient staffing for council and transition-related work should be a priority.

**Current Staffing Budget Status**

On November 29, 2023, council approved Ordinance 191526, which set the appropriation levels for staffing for the offices of the council, the mayor, and city administrator for fiscal years 2024-2026. The CAL budgets just one FTE for each councilor—half of that adopted in the organizational structure resolution of November 1, 2023 (see Amended Exhibit A). Likewise, the CAL fails to budget for the shared operations and legislative staff needed for oversight by an expanded council.

GTAC understands that this ordinance is the starting point of the budget; however, this base level staffing, which can be perceived as at essential levels, is not enough to run a city council.

**Why do we need additional staff in the new form of government?**

Staffing must accommodate the basic functions of both individual councilors and the council as a whole. With the shifting roles in the new form of government, individual councilors will need support for both legislative policy making and budgetary analysis and adoption, now solely the council's responsibility. Furthermore, the new districted governance must staff and support constituent service and community engagement for each councilor.

An expanded council will also require more research and policy staff to support broader legislative operations in a new committee system, as well as city clerk support to the auditor's and city attorney's offices. Augmented staffing of city council can increase community engagement and support of legislative development.

## **How do Portland's proposed staffing levels compare to peer cities?**

Research shows that city council legislative staffing structures—independent of an executive mayor and/or an executive city manager—all must address several fundamental categories:

1. Staff for individual councilors
2. Staff for the presiding officer (council president or a presiding mayor)
3. Legislative staff to the full council
4. Operations staff to the full council

First, compared to peer cities, Portland would have the lowest per councilor staffing at one FTE per councilor. Peer cities average from 2-4 staffers per individual councilor (see Table 1).

Second, combined staffing for a presiding officer, shared legislative staff and operations is fairly consistent. Each city operates under different charters and rules, so staff support varies as well. Among peer cities, staffing distribution varies according to the authority of the presiding officer and staffing of other offices. Refer to Table 1.

**Table 1: Estimated\* council staffing levels of peer cities**

City	Form of gov't**	Council size	FTE per councilor office	Mayoral/ Council President staff (FTE)	Centralized Staff (FTE)	Total Council operations staff (FTE)***
Austin	C-M	11	3	7	31	38
Baltimore	SM-C	15	4	12 <sup>A</sup>	12	24
Boston	SM-C	13	5	55 <sup>A</sup>		55
Denver	M-C	13	4	<sup>A</sup>	29	29
Detroit	SM-C	9	6	4 <sup>A</sup>	44	48
Fresno	SM-C	7	1 to 6	6 <sup>A</sup>	19	25
Indianapolis	SM-C	25	0	<sup>A</sup>	16	16
Milwaukee	M-C	15	2	<sup>A</sup>	40	40
Minneapolis	SM-C	13	2	2 <sup>A</sup>	29	31
Phoenix	C-M	8	3	15	9	24
Sacramento	C-M	9	2.5	14	1 <sup>B</sup>	16
San Antonio	C-M	10	8.5	10	5	15
San Jose	C-M	10	4 to 6	28	18	46
Seattle	SM-C	9	2 to 4	3 <sup>A</sup>	20	23
Portland <sup>C</sup>	M-C	12	1		10	10

\* These are best estimates based on an examination of most recent budget documents, and organizational staffing information publicly available on peer city websites.

\*\* C-M = Council-Manager, M-C = Mayor-Council, SM-C = Strong Mayor-Council

\*\*\* This is the sum of both centralized operations staff and staff dedicated to a presiding officer.

<sup>A</sup> In these cities, the mayor does not preside over Council.

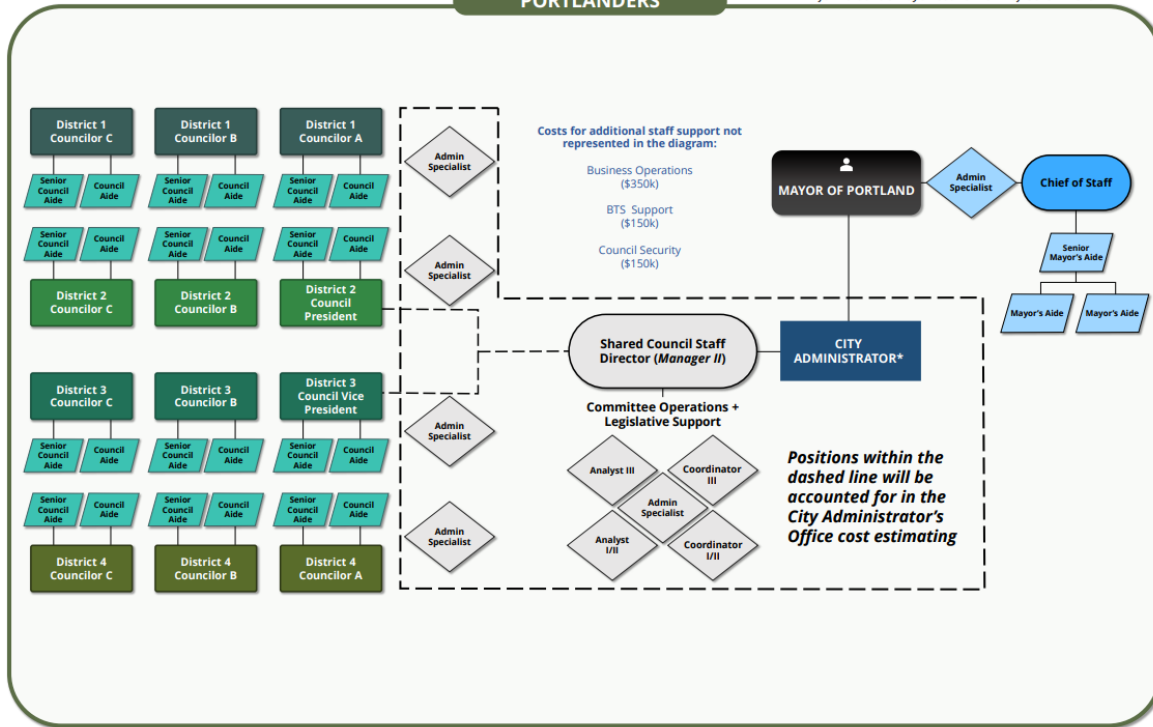
<sup>B</sup> Sacramento effectively outsources council operations staffing to the mayor and councilors' staff.

<sup>C</sup> FTE estimates are based on the CAL Ordinance 191526.

**Sufficient staffing for council and transition-related work should be a priority.**

In November 2023, the City Budget Office forecasted declining revenues. While GTAC understands the current budget constraints, council must properly staff our future council. The CAL Ordinance, in funding just a single staffer for each councilor, disregards how Portland's first elected officials, under a new system, elected in multi-winner elections, will serve constituents and engage community. The new government also strives for more efficient and targeted service delivery. Constituents expect a participatory, accountable government through their districts' councilors. As councilors optimize their new roles, they will need adequate support and funding.

Amended Exhibit A



**Appendix: References and additional resources**

**City Budget Office's (CBO) 2024-2025 budget preparation documents**

<https://www.portland.gov/cbo/2024-2025-budget/development/preparation>

Includes the Mayor's Budget guidance memos #1 and #2, published November 17, 2023 and December 18, 2023, respectively.

**Ordinance 191526 on November 15, 2023**

First reading, presentation by City Budget Office to City Council on November 15, 2023: <https://www.portland.gov/council/agenda/2023/11/15>

Exhibit No. 1:

<https://www.portland.gov/council/documents/ordinance/passed/191526>